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The Pyrenees in the modern era: reinventions of a landscape, 1775-2012 [Book Review]

Westaway, Jonathan

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Martyn Lyons, *The Pyrenees in the Modern Era: Reinventions of a Landscape, 1775-2012* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), ISBN 9781350024786

This book aims to chart the 'changing representations of landscape over time' [p.2] from an outsider's perspective. The Pyrenees as a tourist destination emerged in a contrapuntal relationship with the modernization and territorial assertiveness of the French and Spanish nation states. Topography and history rendered the Pyrenees a reservoir of otherness for national and international travellers and tourists to explore. Deep, isolated valleys preserved customary rights and folk-religious practices. Trans-border identities like Catalan and Basque called into question the legitimacy of the border itself. The survival of independent mountain states like Andorra and geographical exclaves like Llívia only highlighted the nation-state's problem of demarcating territory and exercising control over people lives, whether through identity politics or taxation. The Franco-Spanish border was only finally demarcated on the ground by the Treaty of Bayonne between 1856-1868. Historical identities had traditionally ranged back and forth across the Pyrenean watershed, the mountain frontier zone representing a state of exception, an extraterritorial zone shaped by dynastic struggles, linguistic continuities, peasant transhumance, subsistence agriculture, trans-border smuggling, minority nationalisms and the struggles of refugees.

Lyons is at pains to point out both the strengths and weaknesses of this outsider approach. 'Tourism as a cultural practice always relied on writing to sustain and perpetuate itself' [p.3] and as such the vast majority of his sources are by visitors to the region, most of them concentrated on the significantly more developed French side of the watershed writing in French, Spanish and English. In addition, the author presents himself as an outsider, providing the 'perspective of a historically informed visitor'. [p.i] That historically informed perspective comes largely from books, not direct experience, Lyons making the disclaimer: 'I am not a hiker, I am not a long-distance cyclist and I have never been skiing.' [p.i] The perspective from the *bibliothèque* is very different from that gained on the *Grande Randonnée* or beneath the echoing walls of the Cirque de Gavarnie. The embodied experience of moving through mountains could have brought an experiential perspective to this book that registers a crucial missing third-dimension; that of altitude and its determining role in shaping human habitus and mobilities. The word 'landscape' contains within its etymological foundations the notion of the shaping of place through human effort. History however, is not travelogue or auto-ethnography, and Lyons focus is on perceptions of landscapes shaped by forms of representation and the human behaviours they engendered.

The Pyrenees as a mountain region have received far less historical attention than the Alps. This book addresses that deficit, providing a useful survey of the region. The thematic approach and periodization is highly conventional but none the worse for that, synthesizing Francophone and Hispanophone sources for and English readership. Chapter Two, 'Romancing the Stones? The Enlightenment invention of the Pyrenees' summarises the *voyages savant* of the largely French scientific community as they grappled with the geological and stratigraphic challenges to orthodoxy, both religious and scientific. Here the Pyrenees remained an adjunct to the Swiss Alps: 'Enlightenment scientists made no breakthrough discoveries in the Pyrenees.' [p.27] Lyons explores how epistemic virtues in Enlightenment science were challenged and transformed by Romanticism, exemplified in the life of the geologist Ramond de Carbonnières. Ramond was a Rousseauvian who climbed mountain summits with an eye on deep time, because 'every degree of altitude adds a century to the age of the mountains' [p.28], synthesising in his writing observational science with sublime and picturesque narratives. Raymond was 'a *savant*, but a *savant sensible* – a scholar with

feeling' [p.33.] who, in developing new approaches to the mountains, invented the Pyrenees as a distinct mountain region: 'In 1863, a group of mountaineers founded the Société Ramond in Bagnères-de-Bigorre. He had been installed as the revered ancestor of Pyrenean mountain climbing'. [p.29]

Chapter Three, 'Visions of the picturesque: the romantic Pyrenees' presents the mountains as theorized by devotees of the picturesque, the sublime and the Gothic and their role in shaping a travel literature in search of a pre-modern past, a literature doomed to disappointment with little room for the realities of the daily lives of *montagnard* peasants. Chapter Four, 'Others amongst Others' registers the shock of alterity tourists experienced on encountering subsistence communities and the regions potholed roads traversed by brigands and smugglers. On the Spanish side of the border, Catholicism, the *corrida* and the linguistic autonomy of the Basques all presented their challenges to northern-European travellers. Spanish tourists in France experienced their ultramontane vacations to *Belle Époque* France as a journey into modernity, 'luxury, superficiality and anticlericalism'. [p.68].

Chapter Five, 'The railway age and the coming of mass tourism, 1853-1914' focuses on the integration of these regions into the nation state via the development of transport and tourist infrastructure and provides a fine overview of the role of the *Guides Joanne* guidebooks in 'encouraging a "tourisme cultivé", by describing all the great sites that the traveller could see from the train'. [p.77] If the railways integrated the Pyrenees into the French national imaginary, towns like Biarritz, Tarbes and Pau became fashionable centres for the international haute-bourgeoisie for whom the Pyrenees were but a back drop. Pau had its own exclave British colony: 'By 1869, there were 2,000 British people living there. In Pau the English hunted with hounds and organized horse racing. Sarah Ellis found English doctors there, and mince pies at Christmas.' [p.79] Lyons is particularly good on the social hierarchies of spa resorts but the brisk nature of his survey provides little detail about the wider histories of *thermalisme* (mineral water cures) or *climatologie* (altitude therapy). The precarious nature of therapeutic resorts is illustrated by the fate of the Spanish resort of Panticosa: in 1915 and again in 1917 'avalanches destroyed one-third of its hotel accommodation', a disaster from which the resort never recovered.' [p.83] Chapters Six and Seven further examine the ways in which the Pyrenees emerge as French territorial patrimony via the leisure pursuits of mountaineering and cycling, the encounter with landscape serving to restore French Third-Republic masculinity after the shock of defeat at Sedan in 1870.

Chapter Eight, 'Peoples of the Frontier' outlines the ways in which people resisted the centralizing state and the supposed logic of cultures delimited by political boundaries, examining peasant democracy and localized peace treaties, the economic imperative of smuggling and the cis-montane imagined communities of Basque and Catalan nationalism. Trans-frontier kinship and cultural affinities also made the Pyrenees a site of refuge during conflict and political upheaval. Lyons devotes Chapter Nine, 'Dangerous Borderlands, 1936-45' to the Republican refugees from Franco and the European refugees from the Nazis and Vichy France. Between 350,000 and half a million Spanish Republican refugees walked across the Pyrenean mountain passes to a less than welcoming reception in France and appalling conditions in resettlement camps. The irony was not lost on Spanish and Catalan refugees who, after June 1940, assisted the French victims of Nazi aggression to freedom in Spain. Lyons outlines the work of the freedom smugglers, the *passadores*, and the struggles of the wretched refugees, who were often betrayed to the *Guardia Civil* or, after 1942, to the German frontier police, or simply fell victim to the mountain weather. Strange then that Lyons makes no mention of the *Chemin de la Liberté*, the cross-border trail dedicated to the memory of the refugees that has become a major tourist *sentier de mémoire*, popular with charity groups keen to

commemorate the suffering of wartime refugees. Strange that Lyons makes no attempt to understand how the recent historical memory, still potent in these mountain communities, of bodies scattered in mountain woods, has impacted on contemporary responses to Europe's current refugee crisis.

Lyons' last two chapters focus in on the region's exceptionalism. Chapter Ten, 'The Anthropological gaze' unpicks the persistent habit of scholar-outsiders to frame parts of the region as a 'micro-society trapped between disappearing tradition and disruptive modernity' [p.162], most notably in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* and Natalie Zemon Davis' history *The Return of Martin Guerre*, based on the village of Artigat. Scholarly micro-histories that address aspects of Occitan identity and religious nonconformity had unintended consequences: 'In the twentieth century, Cathar history was appropriated and commercialized by the tourist industry. Tourist guides to the ruined castles of the *Route cathare* attest to the transformation of Catharism into an object of mass consumption.' [p.167] The disappearing object of the anthropological gaze is also axiomatic in the work of Frédéric Le Play and his theory of the ideal Pyrenean family retaining ancient forms of primogeniture, and Pierre Bourdieu's later work on the fate of the disinherited younger sons in non-partible systems of inheritance. Chapter eleven examines conflicts between hunters, communities and environmentalists over the reintroduction in 1996 of bears to the Pyrenees from Slovenia. This book is a useful guide to those approaching the regions history and culture for the first time and, like the nineteenth century *Guides Joanne* itself, that strove to be historical and descriptive, patriotic and uncontroversial, it offers a familiar itinerary and seldom strays far from well-marked trails.

Jonathan Westaway, University of Central Lancashire, 2018.

jwestaway@uclan.ac.uk